

COSMOPOLIS.

PAUL BOURGET'S NEW BOOK.

COSMOPOLIS. By Paul Bourget. Authorized edition. \$12.00 net & Co. 343.

M. Bourget's new novel is at once the most ambitious and the strongest of his writings. It was an original idea to constitute his "dramatis personae" from examples of half the nations of Europe, and to bring them together in Rome and make them act out their drama in the Eternal City. It was not only an original idea, but it has been developed by the author with a thoroughness and a skill which deserves very high commendation. Hitherto it has been complained that M. Bourget was too much given to psychological analysis, that he was always in danger of losing the thread of interest in his stories while probing the motives and setting forth the mind play of his characters. And as one result his most skillful plots and combinations left the reader cold and sometimes even a little wearied. But in "Cosmopolis" he has taken quite a new departure. He gives us a series of portraits which are elaborated and refined, almost after the manner of Balzac; and these portraits are men and women peculiarly fitted by birth, inheritance, position, or other circumstances to arrest and to hold attention.

It cannot be said that all these people are estimable. In truth, they are the strongest mixture of races, tendencies, vices and virtues that has ever been brought together under one roof. The author in his dedicatory letter to Count Primolet thus explains his choice of the situation: "It is the contrast between the somewhat incoherent ways and doings of the wanderers of high life, and the character of perennial existence stamped everywhere in the great city of the Caesars and the Popes, that led me to choose this spot, where the smallest corners speak of a past of centuries, for evoking in it some representatives of that mode of life which is the most modern and also the most arbitrary and most momentary." And he goes on to remark upon the insurmountable difficulties in the way of getting the cosmopolis truly represented.

Nothing, he observes, can be harder than the task of the writer "who takes as his model this fluctuating society, so uniform in the exterior rites of its elegant life, so really, so thoroughly, complex and composite in its fundamental elements. The writer is reduced to taking a series of particular cases, as I have done, while endeavoring to disengage therefrom a law which dominates them. This law, in the present book, is the permanence of race. Contradictory as may appear the result, the more one is familiar with 'Cosmopolis,' the more we are assured that the most irrevocable datum in it is that special force of heredity which shimmers under the uniform monotony of superficial relations, but is ready to awaken as soon as passion touches the groundwork of the man's nature." This is the real keynote of the book, and to understand the author's meaning fully this must be clearly perceived.

The influences of race and heredity are made apparent at every step here, and give to the romance a special significance. The people represent many races and countries; they are English, American, Venetian, Polish, Austrian, Roman, French, and they act after their kind; that is, as the author supposes, though possibly he is not always right in his diagnosis. There are some noble figures here, some very base ones; but those whose passions get in motion the whole phantasmagoria—that is to say, the Venetian Steno and the Pole Boleslas Gorka—might have been transplanted straight from the Middle Ages, so essentially mediæval are they in nearly everything. Madame Steno is a remarkable picture of a very beautiful, fascinating woman, of noble and ancient Venetian blood, who has no moral sense at all; who is simply a magnificent animal, the slave of her fierce passions. Nothing troubles or disturbs her. She has no doubts, no hesitations, no compunctions, but goes on straight to her end with absolute composure and coolness.

Boleslas is another fine animal, but more like a bravo of the tenth century. He has no control over himself, and is carried away by passion recklessly. As a sharp contrast to these, there is Fanny, daughter of the Austrian Jew milliner, Justinus Hafner. She has all the initiates of a young saint, and life is too hard and cruel for her. Alba Steno, the daughter of the "Dionneaux," M. Bourget calls the wicked mother, is another delightful creation. Fanny and Alba together constitute a really beautiful pair, and around them the intrigues and basenesses of the luxurious Roman life fit and pass, leaving but little palpable trace. Another kind of woman is Lydia Matilda, in whose veins there is a drop of black blood. She is the vampire, the demon of the piece, and yet it must be said that she has provocation enough for her plan of vengeance.

But the most gentle, noble and sympathetic character of all is the Marquise de Montfaron, that fine old Paris soldier, who is bound up in the faith of the Eternal City; who lives there in preference to France because it is the centre of his religion; who is a fanatic and a visionary, perhaps, yet nevertheless one of the most interesting and natural characters in all fiction. There is in him a certain remote suggestion of Colonel Newcome, but he is as French as Thackeray's hero was English. It is an admirable piece of portraiture in all ways, however, and M. Bourget's friends, we are told, quite justified in claiming "Cosmopolis" as his masterpiece.

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